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SUBJECT: Georgia: Visit of Senate Foreign Relations Staff  
Delegation Feldstein/Bruder/Guthrie August 27-29, 2009

¶1. (U) Summary: Staff members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) Steven Feldstein, Jason Bruder, and Dillon Guthrie, visited Georgia from August 27 to August 30 and met with a variety of government, civil society, development and international representatives. Themes discussed included the post-conflict security and humanitarian situation, the political situation following the spring protests, progress and status of assistance programs, and civil society development. The visit also included a meeting with the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox church, who stressed that Russia cannot be allowed to act contrary to international law. End Summary.

#### MINISTRY OF DEFENSE REFORMS

¶2. (U) The delegation spoke with both Defense Minister Sikharulidze and Deputy Minister of Defense Muchaidze in separate meetings (Note: Sikharulidze was replaced as Minister later that same day, August 27. Muchaidze has departed the Ministry as well). End note). Sikharulidze discussed the current state of the Georgian military, expressed distress that the Russians continue to act in violation of the August ceasefire agreement, and said he is pleased that the training of Georgian troops by U.S. Marines has begun. The Minister and Deputy Minister stressed familiar themes such as the need for a well-trained and equipped force, and the importance of the EUMM and Georgian efforts to cooperate closely with them. Sikharulidze also repeated that he is grateful for President Obama's message that the Russian-U.S. "reset" will not come at Georgia's expense.

DEPUTY FM BOKERIA, AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. KUTELIA, AND MP KANDELAKI

¶3. (U) In a lunch meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria, Georgian Ambassador to the U.S. Kutelia, and Giorgi Kandelaki, United National Movement (UNM) party member and a member of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Bokeria asserted that an international peacekeeping force is necessary on the ground in the breakaway territories. He opined that if there was an international peacekeeping force in place, a partial return of IDPs would be possible. Bokeria said that the EUMM was an effective group, and suggested that EUMM monitors should be the ones to monitor within the breakaway regions. Bokeria stressed the importance of Georgia's NATO membership, stating that the United States "needs to clarify what is possible" regarding Georgia's potential membership.

#### OPPOSITION MEETINGS

¶4. (U) The delegation met with George Rukhadze and Nikoloz Laliashvili of the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM) to discuss the current political situation from their perspective. Later the delegation met with a group of non-parliamentary opposition members, which included:

Labor Party - Nestan Kirtzadze  
Democratic Movement - United Georgia - David Chezhia  
National Forum - Kakhaber Shartava  
Conservative Party - Kakhaber Kukava  
The Way of Georgia - Otar Chitanava

Members of the staff delegation discussed several issues with the non-parliamentary opposition representatives including possible future participation in parliament itself. Members of the non-parliamentary opposition expressed their view that formal participation in parliament is not possible due to what they called the current "unfairness" of the system. To that end Shartava made the statement that, "We are scared of unfairness. If a system is democratic the people should not be scared." The staff delegation emphasized to the non-parliamentary opposition the importance of participation within the democratic framework, on the local level at the very least. Members of the non-parliamentary opposition expressed their concern over what they called politically motivated retaliatory acts conducted by government authorities against them, including the arrest of party members under false charges and the beating of party members during the spring protests.

MEETINGS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, EUMM, USAID SITE VISITS

15. (U) The DCM hosted a civil society dinner with the following attendees:

Luis Navarro National Democratic Institute  
Bob Fielding, Solidarity Center  
Tamuna Karosanidze, Chair, Board of Directors, Transparency International  
George Chkiadze, Deputy Public Defender of Georgia, Office of Public Defender (Ombudsman)  
Ramaz Aptisauri, Founding Director, UN Association of Georgia  
Keti Vashakidze Eurasia Foundation  
Gia Nodia, Director, Caucasus Studies School

At the dinner the conversation covered a variety of topics including

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freedom of the press, disclosure of ownership of media outlets, and the current political and socio-economic situation. The group also met separately with Bob Fielding of the Solidarity Center, who is on a two-year USAID funded grant to train labor leaders on union organizing. Fielding offered a hopeful but reserved assessment of the current state of labor unions in Georgia, noting the successes of transport unions organizing around the recent proposed changes to the transport system in Kutaisi.

16. (U) At the EUMM, the Staff Delegation met with Jean-Patrick Boudier, Head of the EUMM Gori Field Office. Mr. Boudier gave a presentation on the staffing and work of EUMM throughout Georgia, and mentioned that the Gori Field Office will be relocating soon. The rest of the morning was spent visiting a number of USAID-funded development projects including the Gori Farm Service Center, the Berbuki internally displaced persons settlement where USAID has helped fund small business development, the Kheltubani orchards and corn fields, where USAID provided substantial assistance with fertilizers and seeds last fall and winter, and a visit to a school in Kheltubani that is about to be renovated with a USAID grant. The afternoon was then spent meeting with representatives of the Millenium Challenge Corporation and their partners from Millenium Challenge Georgia and Georgian Oil and Gas. A dinner with USG sponsored exchange alumni followed, including Open World, Humphrey, and Muskie program alumni that included:

Sophie Gorgodze, Head of Teachers' Professional Development Center, Ministry of Education and Science, Open World alumna  
Irakli Kotetishvili, Director of the Public Service Bureau, Open World alumnus  
Kakha Karchkhadze, Head of Innovations Department, Ilia Chavchavadze University, Humphrey alumnus  
Beka Aladashvili, Ministry of Defense, International Visitor Leadership program alumnus  
Tamar Janashia, Muskie program alumna

Participants discussed their experiences in the U.S. and how it affected their careers in Georgia after.

PATRIARCH CALLS FOR RUSSIAN COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL NORMS

¶7. (U) The day ended with a visit to the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II, who stressed that Russia must be held to the standards of international law, and that the status quo in Georgia with Russia occupying some of its territory cannot stand.

¶8. (U) Staff delegation members Jason Bruder and Dillon Guthrie cleared this cable.

LOGSDON